

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

Measuring peacebuilding projects. The case of the Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda Civil Peace Service programme



Most Significant Change: Measuring Peacebuilding Projects The Case of the Civil Peace Service Programme in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda

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INTRODUCTION

This report qualitatively documents the changes generated by the Civil Peace Service (ZFD) programme in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2019 and 2024, while also serving as a learning resource for the wider ZFD community. It aims to inspire other ZFD programmes to explore the Most Significant Change (MSC) cycle as a feasible and participatory approach to understanding and assessing change in complex peacebuilding contexts.

01

INTRODUCTION

Peacebuilding programmes operate in complex, dynamic and often volatile contexts, where change is rarely linear and many of the most meaningful outcomes, such as trust, dialogue, empowerment and social cohesion, are difficult to capture through traditional monitoring tools. This report presents the results of a retrospective qualitative assessment of the Civil Peace Service (ZFD) regional programme implemented in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda since 2019.

Over several years of implementation, the programme has focused on strengthening the capacities of local peacebuilding partners, who in turn work with diverse target groups, including youth, adults and local leaders. While routine monitoring systems tracked activities and outputs, no comprehensive impact evaluation had been conducted across programme phases. As the second programme phase approached its end, the need emerged to reflect more systematically on the changes generated by the programme over time and to document its contribution to peacebuilding in the region.

The MSC process enabled partners, target groups and ZFD staff to collectively identify, reflect on and discuss the most meaningful changes associated with the programme's interventions.

To respond to this need, the programme adopted the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology as a participatory and qualitative approach suited to retrospective evaluation in complex settings. The MSC process, implemented between April 2024 and March 2026, enabled partners, target groups and ZFD staff to collectively identify, reflect on and discuss the most meaningful changes associated with the programme's interventions. Beyond documenting impact, the process also created space for learning, dialogue and shared understanding across countries and among stakeholders. Importantly, this exercise represents the first time a complete MSC cycle has been conducted within the programme.

This report brings together the results of that process. It explains the rationale for selecting the MSC methodology, describes how the process was implemented, analyses the main themes emerging from the stories collected, and reflects on key learnings. In doing so, it aims not only to document programme impact, but also to contribute to organisational learning and inform future peacebuilding efforts within ZFD and its partner network.

MSC AS A METHODOLOGY

The Most Significant Change methodology is a widely used participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodology that focuses on qualitative data, specifically capturing and analyzing stories of change from stakeholders.

It is designed to uncover, not just whether change has happened, but which changes are most valued by those involved.

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MSC AS A METHODOLOGY



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The MSC technique is a participatory approach to programme evaluation that focuses on the collection and discussion of stories of change. It was first developed by Rick Davies in the 1990s, particularly for rural development projects, and has since been widely applied in fields such as social development, health, education and community-based initiatives. Unlike approaches that rely primarily on predefined indicators and quantitative data, MSC provides a way to capture the richness of qualitative experience. It asks not only whether change has occurred, but also which changes are considered most significant by those involved, and why.

MSC provides a way of capturing the richness of qualitative experience. It is about stories. People who have experienced or witnessed change are asked to reflect and describe what they see as the most important change over a given period.

At its core, MSC is about stories. People who have experienced or witnessed change (participants, staff, or community members) are asked to reflect and describe what they see as the most important change over a given period. A typical question might be: "Looking back over the last three months, what do you think was the most significant change in your community as a result of this program?" The story is then recorded in detail, including not only what happened but also why the storyteller believes this change is meaningful.

MSC AS A METHODOLOGY

The process does not end with the collection of stories. These accounts are brought to groups of stakeholders, who discuss them and decide which stories they consider the most significant. The act of selecting stories is as important as the stories themselves, as it reveals what stakeholders value. For example, one group might prioritise stories of economic improvement, while another might highlight stronger community bonds. By debating and justifying their choices, participants make explicit the criteria they use to judge success, creating an invaluable record of perspectives and priorities.

To structure this process, stories are typically grouped into broad “domains of change.” These domains—such as enhanced social cohesion or greater participation of women—are defined at the outset but remain deliberately broad. Within each domain, a small number of stories are selected as the most significant. This selection may be verified by revisiting the storytellers or by cross-referencing with other sources of information, although formal verification is not always required.

Once stories are selected, the reasons for their selection are shared with those who originally contributed them. This feedback loop is crucial. It demonstrates transparency, validates participants’ contributions, and fosters ongoing dialogue between different levels of a programme. Over time, the selected stories can be analysed to identify themes, patterns or trends, which can then inform learning and decision-making at organisational or policy levels.

The MSC methodology is particularly well suited to peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes because it captures the deeply personal, often intangible shifts that traditional indicators struggle to measure. Peacebuilding outcomes, such as rebuilding trust, fostering dialogue, or strengthening relationships across divides, are complex, context-specific, and rarely linear. Through storytelling, MSC allows participants to articulate what peace and transformation mean in their daily lives, surfacing changes that may otherwise remain invisible.

MSC AS A METHODOLOGY



Moreover, the participatory nature of MSC creates space for multiple perspectives, encouraging dialogue among stakeholders and helping to reveal both common ground and differing priorities. In this way, MSC not only documents programme impact but also contributes directly to processes of reflection, reconciliation and learning within divided communities. Stories can also serve as powerful communication tools, helping donors and decision-makers connect with the lived realities behind statistics.

At the same time, MSC presents certain challenges. Collecting and reviewing stories requires time, resources and skilled facilitation. Selection processes may be influenced by bias if certain voices dominate discussions or if committees favour uplifting stories while overlooking more critical or negative experiences. In addition, because MSC does not quantify how widespread a particular change is, it is often complemented by other methods—such as surveys or focus groups—to provide a more comprehensive evaluation.

Despite these limitations, when implemented thoughtfully, MSC offers organisations a valuable way not only to measure change but also to understand what change truly means to the people most affected by it. It is as much a learning process as it is an evaluation tool. The results are not simply collections of stories, but also insights into stakeholders' values and priorities, lessons about what works and why, and a narrative record of impact that numbers alone cannot capture.

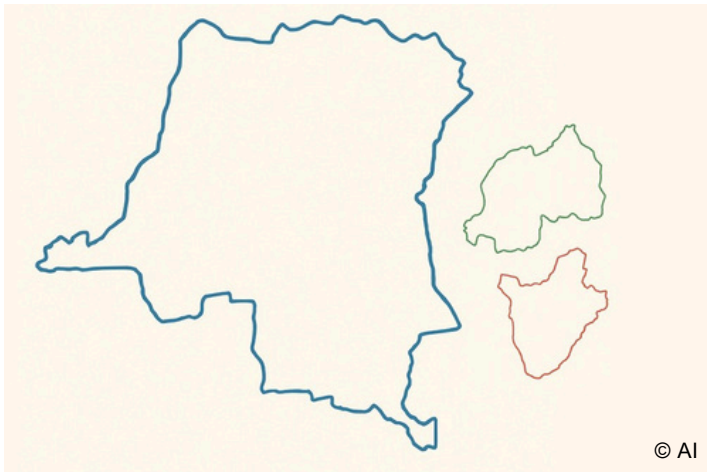
THE PROGRAMME

The Civil Peace Service of the GIZ works regionally in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda since 2019.

The following pages give a glimpse into the context, the partners of the ZFD programme in the three countries, as well as the three outcomes that they are contributing to.

03

THE PROGRAMME



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The GIZ ZFD programme has been implemented in Rwanda since 2001, in Burundi since 2009 and in the DRC since 2019, when it became regional, given the interrelationship between conflicts. It currently supports a total of 8 civil society organizations and one university working in the areas of conflict transformation, the empowerment of youth and vulnerable people, sexual gender-based violence, Dealing with the Past and Critical Thinking.

The ZFD supports dialogue processes and strengthens capacities in nonviolent conflict transformation to improve conditions to foster a culture of peace in the three countries, contributing to SDG 16. It is designed in a way that encourages and promotes that partner organisations from all three countries cooperate across borders as an interconnected community of practice to address conflict issues, based on collaborative processes and standards to implement peace projects. Additionally, it seeks that partners use opportunities for dialogue to address differences in a constructive way, manage existing social conflicts and reflect on how past experiences of violence and sexual and gender-based violence are dealt with.

A fundamental third pillar of the programme includes the identification of common capacity development needs at various levels (leadership, administration, project management, etc.) and in relation to various areas (planning, monitoring and evaluation, economic independence, external communications) and with that in mind, partners and ZFD staff organize joint learning and exchange activities to further develop their capacities and support one another in carrying out their tasks.

OUR PARTNERS AND THE OUTCOMES THEY CONTRIBUTE TO



AIDPROFEN - RDC

The Action and Initiatives for the Protection of Women and Children is an organisation that promotes and defends women's rights in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. They also provide support (psychosocial, economic, legal), advocacy, and safe spaces for women survivors, so both women and girls claim their rights.



APC - DRC

Action pour la Paix et la Concorde is an organisation that supports local actors in the prevention and positive transformation of their conflicts. It aims to contribute to the promotion of peace and harmony between communities and to strengthen the capacities of actors involved in conflict prevention and transformation



CJV - RDC

Club de Jeunes pour la Vie, based in Goma, works with Congolese youth, using artistic, cultural and other forms of expression, as well as sports, to promote peace, social change, and to reduce behaviour that undermines social cohesion.



CARAVI - BURUNDI

The Collectif des Associations pour la Réconciliation et l'Appui aux Victimes des conflits sociopolitiques is a collective of associations of victims of Burundi's socio-political conflicts. It supports victims and push for reconciliation. They engage in advocacy, memory work, support for victims, and pushing for accountability.

THE PROGRAMME



EYE - RWANDA

In Rwanda, Ejo Youth Echo accompanies youth who want to become journalists, coaching and mentoring them, in the production of radio shows and articles in a conflict sensitive way



NAR - RWANDA

Never Again Rwanda engages society to embrace sustainable peace and social justice. Their focus is peacebuilding and social justice. They work with diverse citizens across Rwanda and the Great Lakes region.



PUR - RWANDA

The Protestant University of Rwanda is a private higher learning institution founded by Protestant churches in Rwanda. It aims to provide quality education rooted in Christian ethics, promoting academic excellence and community service. PUR offers programs in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.



RAPI - DRC

Réseau Associatif pour la Psychologie Intégrale is an association dedicated to advancing integral and holistic approaches in psychology. It brings together professionals, researchers, and practitioners interested in integrating scientific, humanistic, and spiritual perspectives on the psyche.



THARS - BURUNDI

Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services is a NGO that focuses on trauma healing, peacebuilding, and reconciliation in communities affected by conflict and violence. It provides psychosocial support, training, and community initiatives to promote healing, coexistence, and social cohesion.



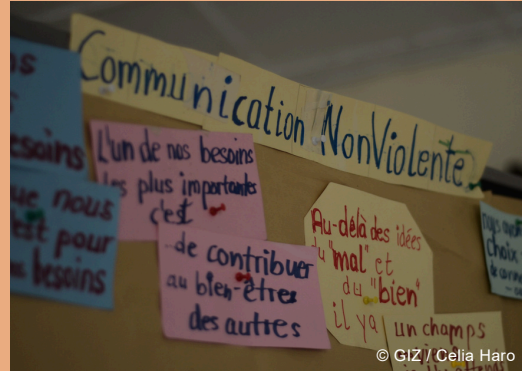
SOJPAE - BURUNDI

Solidarité avec les Jeunes pour la Paix et l'Enfance is an NGO that promotes peace, protects children's rights, and empowers young people through education and community initiatives. SOJPAE focuses on social reintegration, conflict prevention, and advocacy for vulnerable youth and children.

THE PROGRAMME

01.

Civil society actors (individuals, NGOs, grassroots organisations, networks) use opportunities for dialogue to address differences in a constructive way, manage existing social conflicts and reflect on how past experiences of violence and sexual and gender-based violence are dealt with.



Workshop on nonviolent communication (NVC). Throughout the years, the programme has supported the certification of over 50 individuals on NVC



Youth from Burundi, Rwanda and DRC take part in the Public Speaking and Exchange camp organised by ZFD and its partners.

02.

Adolescents and young adults are aware of the risks of gender-based and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, their potential for manipulation as well as their influence on social cohesion, and have further developed their ability to critically reflect on ethnic and gender-based violence in everyday life.

03.

Partner organisations from all three countries cooperate across borders as an interconnected community of practice to address conflict issues, based on collaborative processes and standards for the professional management of peace projects



Members of the Pinga Ujeuri working group on gender and SGBV take part in a joint workshop on gender mainstreaming in the context of escalated violence

THE PROCESS

This chapter presents the rationale for selecting the Most Significant Change methodology and outlines the key stages of the process.

04

THE PROCESS

Why the MSC approach was selected

The ZFD programme has been implemented at regional level since 2019, working across three countries with a range of peacebuilding partner organisations. It focuses on strengthening the capacities of local partners who work with diverse target groups, including youth, adults and local leaders to promote peace, social cohesion and conflict transformation at both community and regional levels.

Despite several years of implementation, no comprehensive impact evaluation had been conducted prior to the current exercise. Monitoring efforts primarily focused on activity implementation and output tracking, with limited attention to outcomes or longer-term change.

As the end of the second programme phase approached, the team recognised in the second half of 2024 the need to identify a way to retrospectively assess the changes generated by the programme over time. In this context, the MSC approach was identified as the most suitable methodology.

Two major constraints influenced this choice. First, no dedicated evaluation budget or explicit evaluation plan had been foreseen at the start of either the first programme phase (2019) or the second phase (2023). Second, no baseline data had been collected, making conventional before–after comparisons or indicator-based impact measurement impossible.

As a result, the evaluation approach needed to be retrospective, capable of operating without baseline data, and feasible within the existing activity budget. It also needed to be integrated into routine monitoring practices rather than relying on parallel systems or additional data collection. Finally, in the absence of resources to recruit external consultants, the approach had to be simple enough to be implemented internally, using the technical expertise available within the programme and partner organisations.

How was the process implemented?

The implementation of the MSC approach was a gradual and iterative process that unfolded over more than one year and was closely embedded within existing programme structures.

THE PROCESS

The process began in April 2024 with a series of PMEL trainings conducted in the three programme countries, involving partner organisations (POs), Local Peace Advisors (LOPAs) and MEL officers. During these trainings, different monitoring and evaluation approaches were presented and discussed. The MSC technique was introduced as one of the possible methodologies for capturing outcomes and longer-term change. Following joint reflection, participants collectively agreed to adopt MSC as the main approach for the retrospective assessment of programme impact.

An online refresher training was subsequently organised in October 2024 to deepen understanding of the MSC approach and to harmonise expectations across countries and partners. During this phase, a standardised template for story collection was developed and shared. Partners also agreed to conduct data collection among their target groups before the end of the year.

Partner organisations, supported by their LOPAs, were asked to identify three to four stories each that they considered representative of the most significant changes resulting from their work since 2019. They were encouraged to reflect on changes linked to programme outcomes, while remaining open to identifying other changes they considered particularly meaningful.

Data collection was carried out until the end of 2024. However, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the process was significantly affected by the ongoing conflict and insecurity. As a result, part of the data collection had to be postponed and was completed in early 2025, in some cases through phone-based interviews.

Partners received continuous support in documenting the stories, including assistance in structuring and writing them in line with the ZFD reporting format, with the support of AI-based tools where appropriate. With guidance from the technical team, all stories were finalised, compiled and organised in preparation for the collective selection phase.

The MSC selection process took place in June 2025 during the programme's General Assembly. A total of 32 stories were reviewed and discussed by participants from the partner organisations. Through a facilitated and participatory process, these were narrowed down to 14 stories, which were jointly identified as the most representative of the programme's work over the years, particularly in relation to Programme Outcome 1 and Outcome 2.

THE PROCESS



Following this selection, it became evident that most stories reflected change at the target group level, while fewer captured change at the partner organisation level. To address this gap, ZFD staff were encouraged to identify additional stories linked specifically to Programme Outcome 3, ensuring that organisational and capacity-development dimensions of change were also adequately represented.

At the end of March 2026, a second MSC selection process was completed. This phase involved ZFD programme staff as well as colleagues at the global level and included the additional stories representing Programme Outcome 3.

The timeline below summarises the overall MSC process from initiation to final selection.

TIMELINE



Three M&E trainings (one per country) to introduce the methodology to the partners, including practical exercises.

April 24



Online refresher sessions with all partners. Agreements on a deadline to select the 3 MSC related to their work with ZFD over the last programme phase. Partners were given 3 weeks to send back a list of the selected cases and a reason why they thought this case was the best to be documented.

Oct 24



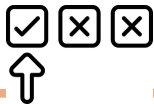
Data collection. Some partners did not manage to collect stories because of different reasons (including the war in DRC) and in January-March 2025 they did it over the phone.

Oct - Dec 24



Online session to support partners to use ChatGPT to write stories of change following the ZFD structure, as well as available tools to support transcriptions.

Nov 24



During the programme's general assembly, the first round of selection was done, resulting in 14 selected stories out of 32.

June 25



Completion of all the 14 with additional information and details.

Sept 25



ZFD staff undergoes the same process and writes MSC stories related to outcome 3.

Nov 25



Final selection of three stories considered the most significant

Mar 26

THE PROCESS

Challenges encountered and key-learning:

- **Uneven qualitative data-collection skills:** Despite the initial trainings, not all LOPAs and partner staff had the same level of skills in qualitative data collection. Some stories were initially submitted in a very short and descriptive format, consisting of only a few lines answering questions rather than rich narratives of change. This made it clear that more time and targeted training are needed to strengthen qualitative data-collection capacities, as a prerequisite for effective use of the MSC methodology.
- **Limitations of the selection process design:** During the selection process (refer to June 2025 in the timeline), stories were divided into three groups, with each group reviewing and selecting from only a portion of the total stories in order to maximise the use of available time. While practical, this approach may have led to situations where stories were excluded simply because groups had to prioritise among a limited subset, rather than through comparison across the full set of stories. Ideally, all participants should read all stories before the selection process. In future applications, story booklets should be shared well in advance to allow sufficient time for comprehensive review.
- **Challenges in writing and documenting stories:** Writing down the stories proved difficult for some technical staff, and substantial support was required to help structure and document them appropriately. This highlights the need to train those involved in writing stories of change, as a prerequisite for MSC implementation. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that there is an inherent risk that some stories may be selected because they are better written rather than because the change itself is more significant.
- **Timing of ZFD staff involvement:** It was realised relatively late in the process that ZFD staff should have been involved concurrently with partner organisations. Partner organisations tended to focus primarily on changes at the target-group level, while important changes related to partner organisations' capacity development, regional engagement (all related to Programme Outcome 3) were initially underrepresented. Although this gap was addressed later by inviting ZFD staff to identify additional MSC stories, future processes should ensure that all relevant actors are involved from the outset.

THE STORIES

The following pages take the reader through a rich and inspiring journey of change, experienced by individuals who participated in activities implemented by the partners of the ZFD programme in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda between 2019 and 2024.

This chapter presents 14 stories selected by partner organisations as the most representative of changes observed among target groups, in relation to Programme Outcomes 1 and 2, as well as one additional story selected by ZFD programme staff as the most significant examples of change linked to Programme Outcome 3.

The stories are followed by a thematic analysis highlighting the main patterns and levels of change emerging across the narratives, and by a final section illustrating the collective selection of the three most significant stories.

05

IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT LAKES, A DREAM OF PEACE TAKES ROOT

J. was only 26, living in Bilenga, when the shadow of conflict still weighed heavily on his community. For years, fear had governed his days, the fear of speaking out, of saying the wrong thing, of fueling the very divisions that had scarred his people. The war had not just destroyed homes, it had left behind invisible fractures: mistrust between neighbors, old ethnic tensions, and hate speech that spread like wildfire across social media. With little civic education and almost no culture of critical thinking, communities remained vulnerable, trapped in a cycle of suspicion and division.

Everything began to change in 2016, when J. stepped onto the stage of a public speaking competition organized by the ZFD. Against all odds, he won. That moment lit a spark. The competition didn't just give him a voice; it revealed his calling: to commit his life to peacebuilding in his community and across the Great Lakes region.

From that point, his journey unfolded in unexpected ways. He embraced leadership roles, first as vice-dean at the MC Institute in Bilenga, then as president of the Protestant University student body. But titles were never his destination. His mission was clear: to guide his peers, to transform frustration into purpose, and to confront hate with dialogue.

One of the most decisive shifts came when he and fellow students began raising awareness about the dangers of hate speech and manipulation, both online and in their neighborhoods. J. saw the impact firsthand. Young people, once passive or even fueled by prejudice, began to question the narratives they had inherited. Some stepped forward themselves, becoming advocates for unity. Through these moments, J. understood that true leadership was not about commanding others, but walking beside them toward change.

Years later, in 2024, ZFD and its partner AIDPROFEN offered him a new opportunity: to take his mission to the regional stage. He joined a series of workshops that redefined his vision.



He learned the foundations of advocacy, the tools to counter disinformation, and strategies to address gender-based violence. These were not just trainings, they were lifelines in turbulent waters, equipping him with the skills to act with courage and clarity.

As communications officer at AIDPROFEN, J. became more than a strategist; a storyteller, amplifying the voices of resilience rising from communities. He shed light on their struggles and their hopes for a future built on coexistence. This role allowed him to remain profoundly human, connected to the heart of the communities he served.

But perhaps the most profound transformation occurred within himself. J. discovered that he could be more than a witness; he could be an actor of change. He often repeats a conviction that has become his compass: to commit personally to the promotion of peace, dialogue, and reconciliation.

What began as a single victory in a speaking contest has grown into what J. calls a silent revolution, one that transforms passivity into action, prejudice into unity, and fear into hope. In a region long scarred by the weaponization of stereotypes, his journey stands as proof that change is possible, and that it often begins with the courage of one voice.

“MY VOICE MATTERS IN PROMOTING PEACE”



My name is Ajuamungu Bendera Serge, I'm 21 years old, and I live in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Today, our reality is one of great uncertainty. Disinformation has become a powerful weapon, used by destructive forces to tear apart the social fabric of our communities. Yet, even amid this adversity, many young people in my school have come to realize that social cohesion is the only path toward sustainable community development. Still, the security situation remains a huge challenge, especially here in Goma.

Before taking part in the Civil Peace Service activities, I was a different person. I saw myself as a loner, struggling to make my voice heard in my community. I wasn't used to joining peace or development initiatives with other young people. I would often hear a piece of information and share it immediately, without taking the time to verify whether it was true.

Then, in August 2024, I had the opportunity to participate in the Public Speaking Exchange activity in Rwanda, supported by AIDPROFEN. That workshop was a real turning point. We didn't just learn how to combat hate speech—we also discovered how young people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony, despite differences of race and tribe.

Most importantly, the activity made me realize the value of critical thinking, a vital skill for navigating the flood of disinformation.

Thanks to this experience, I rediscovered myself. I understood that my voice matters in promoting peace within my community. I realized that by using my voice, I could help other young people benefit from what I've learned—so that they, too, can share it with others.

The changes are tangible and measurable. Today, many students at my school better understand the importance of social cohesion and the dangers of disinformation. That's a huge step forward, because choosing the right path is essential. I'm convinced that we cannot change positively if our environment remains in disorder.

I cannot accept the idea of dying without having contributed to positive change in my community. That is the core of my commitment: through my actions, I want to inspire other young people to get involved and to stand up against hate speech and disinformation.

The people who benefit from this change are my friends, my brothers, my family, and all the members of my community—because they are the ones most directly affected by community development. Everyone is happy about the progress we've made, though I know more work is needed to reach those who are still hesitant.

Given that the security situation remains a major challenge in my area, my role as a peace ambassador is to raise awareness about the dangers of social division. I'm determined to create a platform for discussion among young people in my community—a space where we can keep learning about social cohesion, fight injustice, and dismantle hate speech together.

Before this transformation, I was withdrawn and afraid to speak. The PSE 2024 experience helped me grow, and thanks to the people and organizations I've connected with, I now feel valued and included in my community. I'm leading several activities and even planning to create a network where young people can exchange ideas and engage in community development initiatives.

Through its investment in youth like me, the Civil Peace Service is allowing our dreams of peace to take root and flourish—transforming chaos into a promise of cohesion.

THE JOURNALIST WHO CHOSE A DIFFERENT PATH

In Goma, a city weighed down by long-standing ethnic tensions, H., a young independent journalist, decided to take a path less traveled. For years, her life was dictated not by her own desires but by the traditions of her family. Her parents, firmly attached to tribal values, rejected any idea of marriage outside their ethnic group. Out of respect, H. complied, turning away suitors not because she wanted to, but because they belonged to another community.

Her professional life told a different story. For over eight years, H. reported with fairness and curiosity, eager to give voice to the unheard. Yet, at home, the same openness was constrained. Cultural expectations and family pressure kept her silent, single, and torn between two worlds.

In 2023, H.'s trajectory shifted when she connected with Action pour la Paix et la Concorde through the National Union of the Kavandese Press. A year later, she participated in a training in Tandeka on countering hate speech and practicing conflict-sensitive journalism. The sessions opened her eyes to the mechanics of hate: how stereotypes, once repeated, hardened into barriers, and how words carried the power to divide—or to heal.

For H., the lessons were deeply personal. She began speaking to her parents about the dangers of tribal prejudice, opening conversations that had once been unthinkable. Patiently, she challenged their long-held views, showing them that such rigid attitudes did not protect their community—they harmed it.

At the same time, her professional voice grew stronger. She infused her journalism with the principles she had learned, producing radio programs and writing articles that promoted tolerance and social cohesion. Her work reached listeners and readers across Goma, sparking reflection and dialogue. Many shared how her words had inspired them to re-examine their own biases.

After seven months of persistence, her efforts at home bore fruit. Her parents, once unyielding, began to question their own tribal attitudes. For H., this was more than a family breakthrough; it was proof that change, however difficult, was possible.

Her story illustrates how transformation often begins with a single choice—to challenge the status quo. By breaking the silence within her family and amplifying voices of unity in her community, H. showed that personal courage can ripple outward, reshaping not just a household, but a city scarred by division.



RESTORING MEDIA INTEGRITY IN KALEHE

In the territory of Kalehe, in South Kivu, the Bunyakiri Community Radio has long been a trusted source of information for its listeners. But behind the microphone, Mr. W.M.S., the station's director for eight years, faced a difficult dilemma: how to maintain editorial independence while resisting pressure from political actors? In 2022, a training on conflict-sensitive journalism and combating hate speech provided him with the tools to transform not only his journalistic practice but also the future of the radio station itself.

A journalist and peace advocate for over ten years, Mr. W.M.S. had long been committed to using his platform to inform and unite his community. However, he acknowledges that a lack of knowledge and discernment once led him to be influenced by local political figures who used the station to spread divisive messages—fueling hatred and xenophobia. These practices weakened both the credibility and public image of the radio.

In 2022, as part of the project Supporting Local Peace Initiatives in the DRC, implemented by Action pour la Paix et la Concorde with the support of ZFD-GIZ, Mr. W.M.S. participated in a training on conflict-sensitive journalism. The workshop highlighted the dangers of hate speech and introduced practical techniques for adopting ethical and impartial reporting.

Six months after the training, Mr. W.M.S. undertook a deep reflection on the station's editorial practices. He evaluated the negative impact of the divisive content previously broadcast and decided to take action to restore the integrity of the radio.

Acknowledging past mistakes, he called a meeting with the entire radio staff. During this meeting, he openly admitted that political manipulation had compromised the station's independence and mission. He then made a firm commitment: to end external influence and to adopt an editorial line grounded in impartiality and public awareness.

As a result of this shift, Bunyakiri Community Radio began to regain the trust of its listeners. Programs were revised to promote content focused on education, social cohesion, and peace. Listeners have since testified to the positive impact of this new approach, which has strengthened the station's identity as a key actor in peacebuilding in Kalehe.



BEYOND THE LOCAL IMPACT, TO THE INSTITUTIONAL ONE: THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF VERONIQUE

In a bustling neighborhood in Bukavu, a dispute over the boundaries of a plot of land threatened to escalate into open conflict between two neighbors. As tensions rose, Veronique, a program officer at the NGO Solidarity for Peace and Development in Africa (SPDA), intervened with calm and expertise. Two years earlier, she might not have known how to handle such a situation. But thanks to trainings and workshops offered by APC, she now had the tools to transform complex conflicts into opportunities for dialogue and compromise.

Veronique has worked for SPDA for several years, an organization dedicated to development and solidarity in Bukavu. However, until recently, the NGO's mandate did not explicitly include conflict prevention and transformation, even though such conflicts were widespread in the communities it served.

In 2022, Veronique participated in a training organized by Action pour la Paix et la Concorde on conflict transformation techniques, followed by an advanced workshop on Alternatives to Violence Programme (AVP). These experiences marked a turning point in her approach to tensions and conflicts at the community level.

Four months after the training, a long-standing dispute arose between two neighbors over plot boundaries. Veronique decided to apply the skills she had acquired in APC's workshops. She initiated a month-long mediation process, facilitating discussions, encouraging empathy, and guiding both parties toward a mutually acceptable solution.

The result was a success: the neighbors signed a compromise agreement, resolving the dispute. This process not only restored harmony in the neighborhood but also strengthened the parties' trust in nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution.

Inspired by this successful experience, Veronique raised awareness with her Executive Director about the importance of expanding SPDA's scope to include conflict prevention and transformation. She suggested drawing on the APC's institutional model, which she had discovered and experienced during her trainings.

This proposal represents an institutional transformation sparked by an individual experience. Veronique advocacy marked a step toward integrating conflict management into SPDA's programs, thereby enhancing the organization's impact within the communities it serves.

Veronique's story illustrates how targeted trainings can, not only equip individuals to resolve local conflicts, but also influence an organization's strategic direction. Her success in mediation created a ripple effect, potentially enabling SPDA to address the root causes of conflicts in its areas of operation.

Her journey shows that individual transformation, supported by the right tools and training, can lead to collective and institutional change. From local mediator to promoter of organizational change, Veronique embodies the power of transformation in a context marked by social tensions. Thanks to the skills acquired through APC, she not only restored peace between two neighbors but also paved the way for a more holistic approach to her organization's mission. Her story testifies to the lasting impact of conflict management trainings on both individuals and institutions.



THE STORIES

HOW A WIDOW BECAME A SYMBOL OF HOPE FOR HER COMMUNITY

In the Kamonyi district of Rwanda, a woman known by the Jeanne has transformed her life: from a widow overwhelmed by grief and family conflicts, she has become a pillar of reconciliation and hope within her community. Today, she dedicates her life to educating young children and promoting peace—a mission she never imagined embracing after the hardships she endured.

Jeanne, a 37-year-old mother of two, faced numerous challenges following the loss of her husband shortly after their marriage. Stripped of her property by her in-laws, she found herself without resources or support. Isolated and weighed down by sorrow, she lived in constant tension and distress.

Since 2020, she has found solace through Ejo Show, a program broadcast on the Voice of America by Ejo Youth Echo. Focused on peace education, the show became a guiding light during a period of deep emotional suffering. Through listening to Ejo Show, Jeanne discovered the fundamental principles of peace and reconciliation. The program taught her to channel her pain constructively and develop resilience. Messages of peace, hope, and unity helped her rethink how she approached her suffering.

"I thought I had to hate those who hurt me," she confides. "But the show taught me that peace was the solution. It changed my perspective and allowed me to move forward."

Jeanne transformation began with an inner change. Instead of clinging to bitterness, she chose forgiveness and began rebuilding her life. She regained confidence and reconnected with a community she had once thought lost.

The most remarkable change in Jeanne was the restoration of inner peace: "I was broken and full of bitterness because of everything I had gone through. But after listening to Ejo Show and learning about reconciliation, I understood that life had to go on," she recounts.

Her emotional healing also manifested physically: she overcame a persistent gastric problem, a symptom of the stress she had endured. Strengthened by this renewal, Jeanne created a welcoming space in her home by launching an Irerero (early childhood education program). Open to children aged 2½ to 5, the program allowed her to rebuild connections with her neighbors and community.

Her children, once affected by family conflicts, now thrive, and Jeanne has become a role model for other women. "When a woman faces marital crisis, she often comes to me for advice, believing that my experience can help her avoid the same mistakes," she says.

Jeanne journey illustrates the transformative power of peace education. By choosing reconciliation over conflict, she not only rebuilt her own life but also inspired others to seek peaceful solutions. Her Irerero brings families together, and her guidance supports women facing difficulties. The impact of Jeanne's transformation resonates throughout her community. Her story proves that even in the face of immense pain, peace is possible—and it can lead to collective healing.

From widowhood and family conflict to a role as a peacebuilder, Jeanne embodies resilience and hope. Her dedication to reconciliation and the education of children demonstrates the enduring power of peace. "Peace is everything," she says. "It's the foundation of life."



THE DOMINO EFFECT OF PEACE EDUCATION: TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUALS, CHANGING COMMUNITIES

At just 20 years old, Solange found herself at a crossroads. Surrounded by conflict, frustration, and isolation, she felt like a burden to those around her. But what if the key to breaking the cycle of anger and exclusion wasn't outside her, but within herself? Through a transformative peacebuilding training, Solange discovered that the path to healing and leadership begins with choosing peace. Today, she is a respected leader in her community, showing others that change starts from within.

Solange's high school years were marked by challenges and a sense of exclusion. At Kayonza Modern School, where she had joined the Media Club, she struggled to form connections, feeling angry and misunderstood. She describes herself as "a very angry person" who did not know how to communicate effectively. Her relationships were strained, and she saw herself as a burden to her peers, unsure how to improve her situation.

The turning point came when Solange participated in a peacebuilding training organized by Ejo Youth Echo, an organization that promotes conflict resolution through the media. The program aimed to raise young people's awareness of the media's power in shaping community attitudes and resolving conflicts. The focus was on inner peace: learning to manage emotions, confront challenges constructively, and develop empathy. For Solange, this training was a true revelation.

Solange's transformation was remarkable. She was no longer dominated by anger and chose the path of peace, profoundly changing her relationships. She earned the trust of her peers, who began to see her as a leader, someone to turn to for guidance. "I have become a leader, a person people come to for advice," she says. The most important change, in her view, was realizing that she could positively influence others. "I no longer let negativity control me. I choose peace," she shares. Today, as head of the Ninyampinga Club, she embodies the principles of peacebuilding and guides other young people along the same path of transformation she has taken.



Solange's transformation has had a deep impact, not only on herself but also on her community. Through her leadership, she has become a role model for other youth, proving that change is possible, even for those struggling with anger and isolation. "I want to create opportunities for other young people to experience the same transformation I did," she explains, determined to pass on what she has learned. Her journey illustrates the domino effect of peace education: by transforming individuals, she helps change entire communities. This story demonstrates how personal growth can lead to broader social change, inspiring others to embrace understanding, empathy, and constructive leadership.

From a struggling teenager to a confident community leader, Solange's journey highlights the transformative power of peacebuilding. By choosing peace and investing in her personal development, she has become a symbol of hope for others, proving that even in the face of conflict, change is always possible.

EMPOWERING YOUNG LEADERS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

"I always thought I had nothing to do with other people's lives. Whenever I saw violations of human dignity, I remained silent, waiting for authorities or institutions to intervene. I just wanted to stay on the safe side, without causing problems that could harm me." J.B.B., a secondary school teacher and volunteer with Never Again Rwanda (NAR), led a quiet life during his youth. Shy and often a mere observer, he grew up witnessing conflicts in his community but believed he had no role to play in resolving them. He thought intervening in others' lives could only bring trouble.

This passive stance was challenged when he attended a critical thinking training organized by NAR as part of the Civic Participation and Peacebuilding project, funded by the ZFD of GIZ. The training left a deep impression on him, particularly the principles that would now guide his life

"I learned three essential principles: Obedience is a choice that comes from our own decision; Every person has a lesson to offer to someone with an open heart; We all have a responsibility to make this world a place of peace," he explains. These principles became meaningful when he began facilitating discussions with members of his school's Peace Club. The experience encouraged him to reflect on his own values and his contribution to peace in his community. But his commitment was soon put to the test.

At his school, J.B.B. faced a troubling situation: the new academic director had imposed a harsh rule—physically punishing students who arrived late. This measure caused strong tension and a rift between students and administration.

"To prevent escalation, I decided to seek a sustainable solution. I knew challenging authority was risky. It could harm my career: I could be dismissed or criticized by the director, who might see me as a threat. But I also could not ignore the serious consequences of this practice if I remained passive," he recalls. J.B.B. recognized that physically punishing children violated their rights, including Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which prohibits torture and degrading treatment. He could not remain a bystander to these abuses.

He chose to act. J.B.B. took the risk of addressing the academic director privately to discuss the situation. Although the director was initially reluctant, convinced that physical punishment was necessary for discipline, J.B.B. patiently proposed alternatives, emphasizing the importance of encouraging students to be punctual through positive methods: "In the end, the academic director agreed to abandon physical punishments and launched an awareness campaign on time management during morning meetings. Students were happy to discuss the causes of their lateness with him, and together they found peaceful solutions."

This new approach reduced tensions and fostered better cooperation between students and administration.

Through this dialogue, the director's leadership style underwent a profound change. He became more open to ideas from colleagues and students, whom he now consults regularly before making decisions. In recognition of his efforts, J.B.B. was named "Employee of the Year" and appointed mentor of the Peace Club and special advisor to the director.

J.B.B.'s experience demonstrates the importance of speaking up, even in the face of authority, when justice and peace are at stake. He showed that conflicts can be resolved peacefully and that everyone has a role to play in building a more harmonious community.

J.B.B.'s journey, from passive observer to active peacebuilder, illustrates the transformative power of critical thinking and civic engagement. His commitment proves that even in the most delicate situations, standing up for what is right can create meaningful change. He encourages everyone not to fear challenging unjust authority and to actively contribute to building a peaceful world. His story reminds us that peace begins with individual responsibility; by taking responsibility for ourselves and encouraging others, we can build a more just and caring world.

CRITICAL THINKING AS A SOURCE OF HARMONY AND RECONCILIATION

Rachel, a 16-year-old high school student, suffered profound emotional trauma when her father died in October 2022. This tragic loss was compounded by rumours in her community that her father had been poisoned by a neighbour. Although these accusations were never proven, they invaded Rachel's mind, fuelling her anger and resentment as she struggled to grieve.

Rachel withdrew into herself and found refuge in isolation. She began to channel her emotions through karate: "After every karate session, I felt dominant, endowed with exceptional power and authority to control the people around me". Her behaviour at school became confrontational: she judged others, rejected her classmates' ideas and felt that only her opinions mattered.

Despite her physical strength and the apparent control that karate gave her, Rachel was unable to overcome the psychological trauma caused by the loss of her father. Her repressed anger led her to resent those she believed responsible for his death, even in the absence of any evidence. However, an unexpected change was about to occur.

In September 2023, at the start of the new school year, her karate coach was unavailable. A member of the Peace Club invited her to participate in a group discussion. Initially skeptical, Rachel agreed, thinking she would simply kill time. However, this decision would change her life.

During the discussion, Rachel discovered critical thinking. The theme was moral dilemmas and the impact our decisions can have, positively or negatively, on our lives. It was then that Rachel realised that her deep resentment was based on unfounded assumptions. She was accusing her neighbor of poisoning her father without any evidence: "The decisions we make influence our lives, for better or for worse. I then reflected on the hatred I felt towards those I accused of my father's death, even though no one had been found guilty."

This conversation changed her worldview and helped her understand the importance of basing her judgements on facts. She then adopted the principles of critical thinking and became an active member of the Peace Club.

Rachel's transformation was profound. Thanks to the Peace Club, she learned to appreciate diversity of opinion, to be tolerant and to understand that conflicts can be resolved without violence.

Her journey did not end there. During the school holidays, she decided to take a bold step in her healing process. She went to see the neighbour she had once accused. With a peaceful mind, she asked for forgiveness for the unjustified suspicions she had harboured towards her: "I gave her a hug. We cried for a long time, and then I revealed to her that at one point I had considered taking revenge on her using my karate skills," she says. As a sign of reconciliation, they shared a glass of traditional banana juice.

Rachel also confessed her thoughts of revenge to her family, which relieved and proud of her transformation, supported her decision.

Rachel's story shows how critical thinking and empathy can resolve even the most painful conflicts. By analysing situations objectively, questioning her beliefs and considering other perspectives, she was able to free herself from resentment and begin a process of healing. Her journey reminds us that non-violent conflict resolution, based on empathy and a willingness to understand others, can bring about positive and lasting change in our relationships and communities. Her story invites us to approach difficult situations with an open mind, seeking peace through understanding rather than violence.

Rachel encourages everyone to use these tools to resolve family or community conflicts, thereby strengthening social cohesion, equity and well-being. By looking at the world with an open mind, we can, together, make it a better place.

PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH EXPRESSIVE ARTS

'Abagiye inama, Imana irabasanga' – 'God enlightens the hearts of those who are ready for dialogue'. This Rwandan proverb perfectly sums up the journey of Théogène Ndayambaje and Adelyne Mukeshimana, a couple once trapped in a destructive cycle of alcoholism and conflict.

For six years, Ndayambaje's excessive drinking wreaked havoc on his family: "My husband mismanaged the family's assets because of alcohol. He came home very late every night, making it impossible to sleep in the house." The couple argued frequently, both verbally and physically, to the point that their children fled the house to seek refuge. This climate of constant tension led to a broken relationship, financial instability, and a tarnished reputation in the village.

The path to reconciliation began when Ndayambaje attended a Citizens' Assembly. There he discovered Magnetic Theatre, a method used by the Cohort Peace Centre, a group of young people trained by NAR in partnership with the ZFD-GIZ. The play dealt with family conflicts, positive parenting, masculinity, and children's rights. Ndayambaje recognised himself in the scenes being acted out, and the discussion that followed touched him deeply: "I was surprised to see that the scene being presented reflected exactly the life I was leading with my family. It made me realise the negative impact of my actions and the peaceful solutions available to resolve our conflicts."

Sober and enriched by new ideas, Ndayambaje invited Mukeshimana to attend the next community dialogue session with more Magnetic Theatre performances. Mukeshimana, initially surprised, agreed: "During the community dialogue, we learned that dialogue is a source of understanding and respect in the home," she explains.

On the way home, the couple discussed their broken relationship. They recognised the trauma suffered by their children, who were constant witnesses to their arguments, and understood that their discord had also affected their financial stability. They committed to changing and rebuilding their marriage and family.

Since then, Ndayambaje and Mukeshimana have established a permanent space for dialogue at home: they share their thoughts, listen to each other and make decisions together. Together, they rented land to grow maize and rice, with a successful harvest. With the income generated, they bought livestock and two additional fields to expand their farming business. "The joy I feel when I see my children welcoming their father with a hug is indescribable. They used to fear him. Our family bond is stronger than ever, and we are united in our work," says Mukeshimana.

The Magnetic Theatre method, used by young facilitators trained by NAR, played a key role in this transformation. Through interactive performances that engage the community on pressing social issues, this method sparks deep dialogue on conflict resolution, positive parenting and family cohesion. It allows participants to reflect on their own behaviours and discover non-violent solutions in a fun and participatory way.

NAR's approach to peacebuilding combines tools for identifying problems, analysing conflicts, finding sustainable solutions and developing interpersonal skills. In this case, community dialogues and theatrical performances served as catalysts to help Ndayambaje and Mukeshimana adopt peaceful and constructive behaviours.

The transformation of Ndayambaje and Mukeshimana demonstrates the power of dialogue and the capacity for change in individuals when they have the tools to resolve conflicts peacefully. This couple not only healed their relationship, but also strengthened their family and improved their economic situation.

THE POWER OF LOCAL PEACE INITIATIVES

E. was born in a land marked by conflict. In South Sudan, where tribal violence, political instability and economic hardship are part of everyday life, he never imagined that one day he would become a peacemaker. And yet, thanks to his transformative journey, notably his studies at the Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR) and his involvement in the Alternative to Violence Programme (AVP), E. has succeeded in establishing peace between two historically rival tribes: the Toposa and the Jie. He thus proves that, even in the most hostile contexts, peace is possible with determination and the right tools.

South Sudan, born out of many years of war, continues to face internal conflicts. The scars of the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan are still visible, and the post-independence period has been marked by power struggles, economic instability and inter-tribal violence. E. grew up in this climate of division, in a country made up of 64 tribes that are often in conflict. He knew little about peacebuilding. His initial studies had destined him for another field, but his life was about to take a decisive turn. In 2017, E. arrived in Rwanda to study at PUR. Initially enrolled in another programme, he switched to peace studies, where he discovered his true calling. In 2018, he joined the PUR Peace Club, which played a key role in his development. Thanks to the university's programmes and resources, he acquired theoretical and practical knowledge on conflict resolution, dialogue facilitation and community engagement.

In 2019, he participated in the AVP workshops offered by ZFD-GIZ in partnership with PUR. At first, the concepts of conflict analysis and non-violent communication seemed far removed from his reality. But as he deepened his learning and applied it, E. discovered its transformative potential.

After graduating from PUR, E. returned to South Sudan with the desire to put his new skills into practice. He joined the Holy Trinity Peace Kuron organisation, founded by the late Monsignor Paride Taban, a major peace activist in the country and led reconciliation efforts between the Toposa and Jie tribes, long-time enemies due to cattle raiding.

At a time of heightened tensions, he initiated dialogue between the two communities. Through patient and persistent mediation, he achieved a historic breakthrough in 2022: for the first time in generations, the violence ceased. Today, these communities, approximately 1.5 million people, live in peace, intermarry and collaborate. This change, in an isolated area with little support from the state, demonstrates the power of local peace initiatives.

E. attributes this success to the skills he acquired at PUR. One of the most decisive lessons was the importance of community peace committees, which he formed to facilitate dialogue and manage conflicts. These structures play a key role in sustaining the gains of peace.

Children from both tribes now attend school together, something that was unimaginable in the past. Of course, some resisters still oppose peace. But E. remains committed to strengthening dialogue, training and conflict management.

E.'s studies at PUR have been essential. The emphasis on conflict analysis, non-violent communication and concrete peacebuilding strategies has enabled him to navigate the complex realities of South Sudan. His work demonstrates the importance of community engagement and empowerment: by training communities to resolve their own conflicts, E. has had a lasting impact. He now aspires to expand his work to the national level. With 64 tribes still in conflict, he firmly believes that the skills he acquired at PUR, combined with his field experience, can contribute to building a peaceful nation.

His story is a powerful reminder that building peace is not just about ending conflict: it is about building sustainable systems to ensure genuine peace for generations to come.



FROM STEREOTYPES TO UNITY

H.M., a 25-year-old woman from Goma, in DRC, left her country in 2017 to study Peacebuilding and Development at PUR. At the time, she had no idea how much her life and worldview would change. Having grown up with many prejudices against Rwandans, she never thought she would be able to live with them or even understand them. But her journey would challenge these deeply held beliefs and transform them in unexpected ways.

Before going to study in Rwanda, H.M. and her family harboured a strong distrust of Rwandans. They considered them cold, hypocritical, and filled with hatred towards Congolese people. This view had created a culture of separation and mistrust, leading them to avoid any contact with Rwandans and to maintain negative ideas about them. Her journey took a decisive turn when she arrived at PUR. There she discovered a diverse community, which began to shake her initial stereotypes. She quickly joined the PUR Peace Club and participated in her first AVP workshop in 2018. This programme, supported by GIZ-ZFD, enabled her to acquire practical skills in conflict resolution and non-violent communication. In 2021, she became a certified AVP facilitator, which has empowered her to have a positive impact not only in her own life, but also within her family and community: 'The AVP programme has helped me get to know myself better. I have learned to analyse my reactions and respond to conflicts in a peaceful manner.'

H.M.'s transformation has been profound. She began to apply what she learned to her relationships, particularly with her family. During the holidays, she shared her new knowledge, which gradually influenced their perspectives. Their discourse evolved from stereotypes to an appreciation of diversity: "Before, family discussions were full of prejudices about Rwandans. Today we talk about the

the beauty of diversity, and we no longer judge people based on their origins."

The most striking change came when her mother, who had previously been very opposed to Rwandans, agreed to visit a Rwandan friend in Rubavu (Gisenyi). The visit proved to be positive and helped to break down her preconceptions. This was a decisive moment for H.M., marking a personal and family transformation.

H.M.'s work as a AVP facilitator did not stop with her family. She began facilitating workshops in Goma with various NGOs, targeting young people and staff members. For her, young people are at the heart of a peaceful future because they are curious, receptive and willing to learn non-violent approaches: "I am convinced that if we teach non-violent communication and conflict resolution from an early age, we will guide young people towards a better future".

She has also worked with displaced communities in camps around Goma, helping people resolve tensions and rebuild mutual understanding. Her work also included psychological support, which she believes is essential for lasting peace: "In the DRC, many people bear the scars of conflict. It is essential to help them heal and understand that peace is a way of life."

H.M. has learned that peacebuilding begins with oneself: "I have to live what I teach, because if others see me embodying peace, they will believe in it too."

Today, she continues her commitment with the desire to build a society where all generations embrace peace and non-violent communication. Her dream is to contribute to a community based on unity, healing and understanding, a world where children grow up knowing the value of peace, just as she has discovered it.



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FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION FOR PEACE

It was in 2014 that I first encountered SOJPAE Burundi, an organization dedicated to promoting peace through school clubs. At that time, it was active in about ten secondary schools within the Provincial Directorate of Education (DPE) of Makamba.

Back then, I was serving as an education advisor in charge of pedagogy at the DPE Makamba. That's when I discovered a dynamic program where students participated in public speaking contests known as Public Speaking and Competition. Each year, young people debated on themes related to peace, but within a competitive framework, where the goal was to win. Eloquence and mastery of speech were key criteria for success, and students were encouraged to outperform their peers. While this approach did foster strong engagement, it did not always promote the collaboration and complementarity needed to build a genuine culture of peace.

Over time, and through my growing involvement in the activities of these peace clubs, I began to recognize the importance of an approach based on collaboration rather than competition. Today, these clubs go beyond contests and focus instead on dialogue and mutual support. My role now is to closely monitor the activities of these peace clubs in the schools of DPE Makamba and to ensure that they truly contribute to building a lasting culture of peace.

Students no longer strive merely to excel individually but to help one another and jointly promote essential values such as tolerance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Some schools have even adopted their own club mottos, such as "Zero pregnancy at school" or "Zero failure at school", reflecting their commitment to a healthy and nurturing educational environment for all.

Through my work supporting peace clubs, I too have been deeply transformed. The messages shared by these young people resonated within me and led me to question my own beliefs. I learned to dismantle the prejudices and stereotypes that still affect our society. Today, dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts guide my actions and interactions.

Beyond personal transformation, this experience has also allowed me to expand my network and build strong relationships with former peace club students, school principals and mentors. This fraternal network has strengthened my commitment and broadened my outlook on the world.

Thanks to SOJPAE, I have also had the opportunity to travel abroad, which has opened new horizons for me and taught me how to navigate diverse contexts. I have developed key skills such as rumor management, cultural adaptation, and understanding youth temperaments.

The impact of this shift toward a more inclusive and collaborative approach is visible not only among students but also within the teaching staff and the broader educational community. By emphasizing cooperation, we have created an environment where young people feel heard, understood, and capable of contributing to the construction of a more peaceful future.

My involvement with SOJPAE and the peace clubs goes beyond professional duty; it has become a deep conviction: education is the key to change and that every young person trained in peace becomes an agent of social transformation.

My journey within the peace clubs has shown me how much hope and positive initiative lie within the youth. The shift from a competitive approach to a spirit of collaboration has not only enhanced the impact of the peace clubs but has also transformed my vision of education and peace.

Today, I continue to accompany young people on this journey, convinced that each dialogue initiated and each conflict resolved peacefully brings our society closer to a calmer and more harmonious future.



DON'T JUDGE BEFORE LISTENING

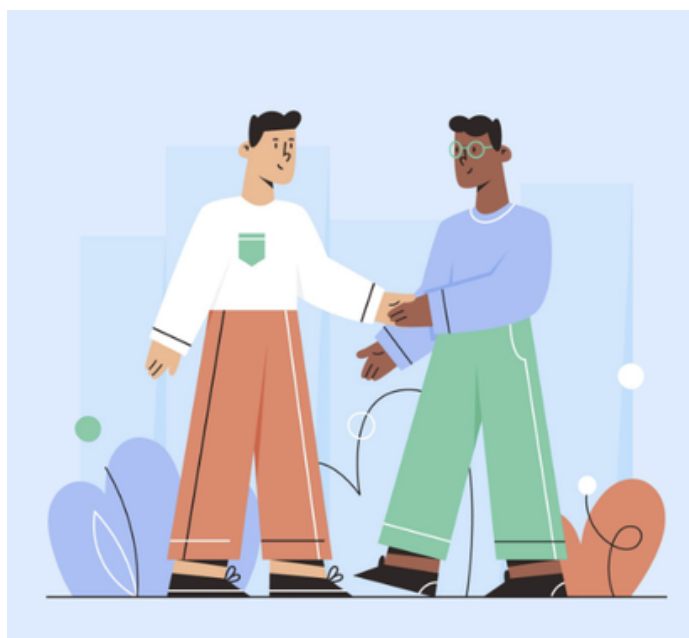
In the provinces of Makamba and Rumonge, communities once scarred by conflict, trauma, and division are now experiencing profound transformations. Through their participation in peacebuilding and trauma healing programs, individuals have discovered resilience, reconciliation, and a renewed sense of purpose. These stories highlight both personal and communal change, proving that dialogue, forgiveness, and reflection can lead to lasting peace.

Kabura Peke, a 41-year-old man from Rumonge, was once feared for his aggressive political activism. Known for inciting violence, he ignored his father's advice to act kindly, believing that intimidation was a sign of strength.

During a AVP workshop, Peke's outlook changed. The training emphasized patience, dialogue, and the consequences of impulsive reactions, helping him realize that violence only perpetuates a cycle of revenge and instability.

A particular incident marked his transformation: a woman slapped him unjustly, expecting a violent response.

Instead, Peke remained calm and did not retaliate. When the woman was later arrested by the police, he pleaded for her release, explaining, "She acted out of ignorance." This act of forgiveness shocked the community, earning him the nickname "Christian," and turning him into a role model for peace.



Although some of his former political allies now see him as a traitor, Peke remains determined to avoid violence and continue his commitment to peace. His story has inspired others, who now request similar training to change their own behavior.

Note: This story is part of a series of four, including individuals from Makamba and Rumonge provinces. The story of Peke was the only one that was selected.

THE STORIES

THE JOURNEY OF A TEACHER WHO BUILDS PEACE

At GS Nyakiriba, a secondary school in the Rubavu district of Rwanda, Françoise Nyiraboneza once believed that the only way to maintain order in times of conflict was through the use of force. As a teacher, she imposed discipline with authority, convinced that structure and control were the foundations of peace: "At the time, I thought that without a firm hand, everything would fall apart" she says. But everything began to change when she encountered Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle (VJN) and joined its peace education efforts as part of a partnership with the ZFD-GIZ. Through workshops, critical thinking training and peacebuilding tools such as the AVP, Françoise's vision of peace was completely transformed.

Before discovering VJN, Françoise's reality as a teacher was one of daily challenges. Her students lived in poverty and sometimes found themselves in situations of tension or conflict. These conditions led to frustration, competition, and misunderstandings, not only among students, but also between students and teachers. Françoise managed these situations with authority, favouring discipline over dialogue: "There was no room for discussion.

If there was a conflict, I dealt with it through force or silence." In 2014, she joined VJN's peacebuilding programmes, initially participating in public speaking activities and exchange activities, attracted by the competitive spirit. But thanks to VJN's support, she came to understand that the goal was not to win, but to share, learn and build bridges.

Her real transformation began during the AVP workshops. There she discovered tools such as conflict mapping, active listening and the 'peace tree' model, an exercise that helped her reflect on her own values and behaviours. These provided her with a new framework for understanding and managing conflict. She began to see communication, empathy and understanding as powerful skills.

Armed with this new knowledge, Françoise took action. She became a mediator at her school, helping to resolve conflicts between students and supporting colleagues in managing tensions in the classroom, encouraging collaborative approaches. Françoise's transformation was profound and personal. She no longer saw force as a solution: "I learned to stay calm and listen. Peace begins with humility."

A particularly memorable moment was her intervention in a conflict between pupils accusing each other of theft. The group was divided, each side convinced of the other's guilt. Thanks to her AVP training, Françoise brought them together for a structured dialogue. She encouraged them to speak frankly and listen carefully. By the end of the session, they realised that the items had probably been misplaced and, more importantly, they discovered the power of dialogue to restore trust.

At GS Nyakiriba, her influence is visible: Students talk things through before conflicts escalate, teachers seek her mediation

Her work extends beyond the school walls. At church, she facilitated a difficult dialogue between two families who had been in conflict for a long time. "At first, they refused to be in the same room together, but after the dialogue, not only did they reconcile, but they now collaborate on community projects." At home, she has established a family tradition of sitting down together to discuss problems. Inspired by her example,

her children have adopted a more respectful and thoughtful way of dealing with disagreements.

In the community, her story inspires others to adopt peaceful approaches. Although challenges remain, Françoise remains committed: "There are still people who don't want peace, but every little step counts. If I have changed, so can others."

Françoise Nyiraboneza began her journey of peace believing that discipline and control were the only ways to manage conflict. Today, she does more than just teach: she is training a generation of peacebuilders. Her story shows that with the right support and a change of perspective, a single teacher can bring about lasting change in their classrooms, families and communities.



FACILITATING BEYOND BORDERS

In December 2023, during an Alternative to Violence Programme (AVP) workshop in Bujumbura, a significant shift in regional peacebuilding collaboration became visible. Facilitators from Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were gathered, but what stood out was that Cosmas, a facilitator from RAPI in the DRC, co-facilitated the workshop alongside Joyeuse from THARS in Burundi. This marked one of the first instances of facilitators from different organizations and countries working together in this way.

Previously, partner organizations such as RAPI and APC mainly operated independently, focusing on their own communities. Although they shared the goal of promoting nonviolent conflict transformation, exchanges and joint facilitation across borders were rare. This limited opportunities for shared learning and regional strengthening of peacebuilding efforts.

This began to change through the Amahoro Mazima reflection group and the regional AVP committee, established in 2022 at PUR (former PIASS). Through regular consultations, networking, and advisory support, facilitators built trust and were encouraged to collaborate more closely. A key step was when organizations began sending participants to each other's workshops and facilitators started co-facilitating across borders.

The December 2023 workshop in Bujumbura became an important milestone, especially as THARS had not conducted AVP workshops for some time. This collaboration demonstrated increased confidence, strengthened facilitator skills, and created richer learning experiences for participants exposed to diverse perspectives.

The impact extended beyond a single workshop. Relationships between partner organizations were strengthened, and facilitators increasingly saw themselves as part of a regional network rather than isolated actors. This enhanced their motivation, capacity, and ability to respond to conflict.

Continued support for the regional AVP committee and facilitator network remains essential to sustain this progress. Ongoing networking, refresher trainings, and co-facilitation opportunities help maintain collaboration and trust.

This experience illustrates how connecting peacebuilders across borders transforms individual efforts into a stronger regional movement, enhancing the collective capacity to build peaceful communities



THE STORIES

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE MSC STORIES

The stories collected and presented above offer a rich qualitative picture of the changes generated by the ZFD programme over time.

A clear and consistent pattern emerges across the narratives about the target groups (Outcome 1 and Outcome 2): the vast majority of changes are located at the individual level, with some stories demonstrating spill-over effects at family, community or, more rarely, organisational level. This reflects both the nature of the programme's interventions and the way partners initially framed and identified significant change.

Predominant level of change: individual transformation

Most stories describe deep personal transformations experienced by youth, community members, journalists, teachers, students or peace practitioners. These transformations often involve shifts in attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and self-perception, such as moving from fear or passivity to agency, from prejudice to openness, or from violence to dialogue. Examples include young people discovering their voice as peace ambassadors, individuals learning to critically assess disinformation and hate speech, or participants developing emotional regulation, empathy and non-violent conflict resolution skills. These individual changes form the foundation upon which broader peacebuilding outcomes can emerge.

Key thematic clusters across stories

Several recurring themes cut across countries, partners and target groups:

- Critical thinking and countering hate speech

Many stories highlight the acquisition of critical thinking skills as a decisive change, particularly in contexts marked by disinformation, ethnic polarisation and manipulation. Participants describe learning to question narratives, verify information, and resist hate speech, both offline and online. This theme is especially strong among youth, journalists and students engaged through public speaking, media clubs and conflict-sensitive journalism trainings.



THE STORIES

- Inner peace, healing and emotional transformation

A significant number of stories focus on inner change as a prerequisite for peacebuilding. Participants recount processes of personal healing from trauma, grief, anger or resentment, often linked to experiences of violence or loss. Through peace education, dialogue spaces or psychosocially informed approaches, individuals describe regaining inner peace, self-worth and emotional balance, which then enables constructive engagement with others.

- From passivity to agency and leadership

Several stories document a shift from silence or withdrawal to active engagement. Individuals who previously felt powerless or afraid to speak describe becoming facilitators, mediators, journalists, peace club leaders or community role models.

- Dialogue, reconciliation and non-violent conflict resolution

Many narratives illustrate how participants applied newly acquired skills to resolve concrete conflicts—within families, schools, neighbourhoods or communities. Dialogue, mediation and non-violent communication emerge as central tools, leading to restored relationships, reduced tensions and, in some cases, reconciliation across deep social divides.

Spill-over effects beyond the individual

While individual change is dominant, several stories demonstrate secondary effects at other levels. Some show family-level change, such as improved relationships, reconciliation or shifts in entrenched attitudes. Others highlight community-level influence, where individuals inspire peers, influence school practices, restore trust in local media, or contribute to social cohesion. A small number of stories point towards organisational or institutional change, where individual capacity development leads to shifts in organisational practices or mandates, though these remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Overall reflection

Taken together, the stories portray peacebuilding as a gradual, relational and deeply personal process. They confirm that the ZFD programme's impact has largely unfolded through individual transformation, which in turn creates the conditions for wider social change. The collection thus provides a coherent qualitative narrative of impact, while also highlighting the need, in future MSC processes, to more deliberately capture change at organisational and systemic levels alongside individual experiences.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion highlights that the MSC approach is particularly well suited for ZFD to retrospectively evaluate a programme phase. However, when implemented seriously, MSC is a long and demanding process that requires sustained commitment and close collaboration between ZFD colleagues, partner organisations, target groups and programme coordinators.

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CONCLUSION

Overall, this exercise confirms that the MSC methodology is particularly well suited to assessing the retrospective impact of the ZFD programme, especially in a complex, long-term and multi-country peacebuilding context where baseline data and prior impact evaluations were not available. MSC proved feasible to implement within existing activities and resources, while allowing for a rich qualitative understanding of change over time.

At the same time, the process demonstrated that MSC is not a short or light exercise: it requires long-term planning, sustained accompaniment of partners, and the involvement of complementary technical expertise, notably in PM&E, communications and digital tools. Beyond its evaluative function, the MSC process itself emerged as a powerful moment of collective reflection, enabling partners and ZFD staff to look back, make sense of results achieved, and build shared understanding and consensus around what has changed, what works, and what deserves to be strengthened in future programme phases. Finally, the stories generated through this process represent valuable assets not only for impact documentation, but also for communication and learning purposes, with strong potential to be further leveraged by partner organisations and by ZFD at country, regional and global levels.

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